Nabataean Arabic

Nabataean Arabic was the dialect of Arabic spoken by the Nabataeans in antiquity.

In the 1st century AD, the Nabataeans wrote their inscriptions, such as the legal texts carved on the façades of the monumental tombs at Mada'in Salih, ancient Ḥegrā, in Nabataean Aramaic.

It is probable, however, that some or all of them, possibly in varying proportion depending on the region of the Nabataean Kingdom where they lived, spoke Arabic.[1]

Nabataean Arabic	
Region	Northwestern Arabian Peninsula and the southern Levant
Era	4th century BCE to 1st century CE
Language family	Afroasiatic ▪ Semitic ▪ West Semitic ▪ Central ▪ Arabic ▪ Ancient North Arabian ▪ **Nabataean Arabic**
Writing system	Nabataean
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	*None* (mis)
Glottolog	*None*

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Phonology

Consonants

Consonant phonemes of Nabataean Arabic

		Labial	Dental	Denti-alveolar		Palatal	Velar	Pharyngeal	Glottal
				plain	lateral				
Nasal		[m] m – م		[n] n – ن					
Stop	voiceless	[pʰ] p – ف		[tʰ] t – ت			[kʰ] k – ك		[ʔ] ʾ – ء
	voiced	[b] b – ب		[d] d – د			[g] g – ج		
	emphatic			[tʼ] ṭ – ط			[kʼ] q – ق		
Fricative	voiceless		[θ] ṯ – ث	[s] s – س	[ɬ] s[2] – ش		[x] ẖ – خ	[ħ] ḥ – ح	[h] h – ه
	voiced		[ð] ḏ – ذ	[z] z – ز			[ɣ] ġ – غ	[ʕ] ʿ – ع	
	emphatic		ẓ[1] – ظ	[sˤ] ṣ[2] – ص	ḍ[1] – ض				
Rhotic				[r] r – ر					
Approximant					[l] l – ل	[j] y – ي	[w] w – و		

^1 These consonants were probably voiceless, in contrast with Old Higazi, where they may have been voiced[2] It is clear that in southern Syria the two sounds had not merged and that they remained voiceless. The evidence from Nessana, on the other hand, suggests that both reflexes were voiced, and that they had possibly merged to [ɮˤ].[3]

^2 There is evidence that [tsʼ] had deaffricated and pharyngealized to [sˤ].[3]

Vowels

Monophthong phonemes

	Short		Long	
	Front	Back	Front	Back
Close			iː	uː
Mid	e	o		
Open	a		æː	aː

In contrast with Old Higazi and Classical Arabic, Nabataean Arabic may have undergone the shift [e] < *[i] and [o] < *[u], as evidenced by the numerous Greek transcriptions of Arabic from the area. This may have occurred in Safaitic as well, making it a possible Northern Old Arabic isogloss.

Nabataean א in 𐢕𐢏𐢎𐢀 does not signal [a:]; it would seem that *ay# collapsed to something like [æ:]. Scribes must have felt that this sound was closer to א when the spelling conventions of Nabataean were fixed. In Greek transcription, this sound was felt to be closer to an e-class vowel, yielding Δουσαρης.[3]

Grammar

Proto-Arabic (unattested)

	Triptote	Diptote	Dual	Masculine Plural	Feminine Plural
Nominative	*-un*	*-u*	*-āni*	*-ūna*	*-ātun*
Accusative	*-an*	*-a*	*-ayni*	*-īna*	*-ātin*
Genitive	*-in*				

Proto-Arabic nouns could take one of the five above declensions in their basic, unbound form. The definite article spread areally among the Central Semitic languages and it would seem that Proto-Arabic lacked any overt marking of definiteness.

Pre-Nabataean Arabic (unattested)[4]

	Triptote	Diptote	Dual	Masculine Plural	Feminine Plural
Nominative	*-u*	*- ∅*	*-ān*	*-ūn*	*-ātu*
Accusative	*-a*		*-ayn*	*-īn*	*-āti*
Genitive	*-i*				

Final short vowels were lost, then nunation was lost, producing a new set of final short vowels. The definite article /ʾal-/ entered the language shortly after this stage.[4]

Nabataean Arabic (ʿEn ʿAvdat, c. 125 CE)

	Triptote	Diptote	Dual	Masculine Plural	Feminine Plural
Nominative	*(ʾal-)...-o*	*- ∅*	**(ʾal-)...-ān*	**(ʾal-)...-ūn*	**(ʾal-)...-āto?*
Accusative	*(ʾal-)...-a*		**(ʾal-)...-ayn*	**(ʾal-)...-īn*	**(ʾal-)...-āte?*
Genitive	*(ʾal-)...-e*				

The ʿEn ʿAvdat inscription shows that final [n] had been deleted in undetermined triptotes, and that the final short vowels of the determined state were intact. The reconstructed text of the inscription is as follows:[5]

1. *pa-yap ʿal lā pedā wa lā ʾa**ṯ**ara*
2. *pa-kon honā yabġe-nā ʾ**al-mawto** lā ʾabġā-h*
3. *pa-kon honā ʾarād **gorḥo** lā yorde-nā*[4]

Translation: "And he acts neither for benefit nor favour and if death claims us let me not be claimed. And if an affliction occurs let it not afflict us".[6]

Nabataean Arabic (JSNab 17, 267 CE)

	Triptote	Diptote	Dual	Masculine Plural	Feminine Plural
Nominative	*(ʾal-)...-o*	*- ∅*	*?*	*?*	*?*
Accusative					
Genitive					

In JSNab 17, All Arabic triptotes terminate in *w* regardless of their syntactic position or whether they are defined.

References

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External links

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